

100.202
25
70
5

Canada Agric. Dep.

3 1761 12000932 9

AN OPPORTUNE TIME FOR STEER FEEDING AND FINISHING

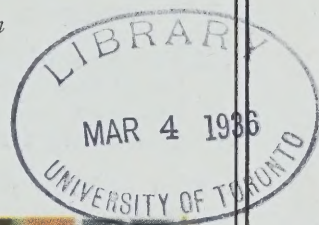
Reasonable Buying-in Prices
Combined with a Cheap and Plentiful Feed Supply
A Strong Argument for Cattle Finishing

BY

G. W. MUIR, B.S.A.

*Acting Dominion Animal Husbandman
Ottawa, Ont.*

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY DIVISION
DOMINION EXPERIMENTAL FARMS



Good type, well finished Hereford steers at twenty-two months of age.

DOMINION OF CANADA
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
—
PAMPHLET No. 143—NEW SERIES

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The outstanding and most important facts contained in this pamphlet are:—

1. Although cattle prices are comparatively low, fed calves, yearlings and two-year-old steers, properly finished, have demonstrated that they can turn our present plentiful and otherwise unmarketable coarse grains into a reasonable profit.
2. Well finished young cattle command a premium on the home and export market at all times and never lack a sale.
3. Well finished young cattle have sold on the British market at prices equal to those paid for the best home-grown stock.
4. Western conditions are highly favourable to the production of fed calves and yearlings.
5. Eastern conditions favour the finishing of steers at eighteen months up to two years.
6. The age limit for profitable feeders is two years.
7. Outdoor feeding is generally practicable. Barley, oats and bran put on fast gains. Gains of 2 pounds per day are easily possible.
8. The market is constantly bare of deep, well finished cattle in strongest demand to-day, and there is profit in catering to the market preference for these.

AN OPPORTUNE TIME FOR STEER FEEDING AND FINISHING

Reasonable Buying-in Prices Combined With a Cheap and Plentiful Feed Supply A Strong Argument for Cattle Finishing

Conviction that the present is an opportune time for feeders in both Eastern and Western Canada to turn their attention to the finishing of steers as a profitable outlet for a plentiful and cheap coarse grain supply, despite the comparatively low cattle price levels, has developed out of recent experiences in the feeding, on a practical scale, of beef cattle of good commercial type to a proper degree of finish. Since the cattle were purchased, handled and fed under conditions and through practices which may commonly be duplicated in both the East and the West, there is being recorded herein the history of the purchase, feeding and sale of the various lots of cattle in the test, with the sincere hope that feeders in the various provinces, who have a plentiful supply of feed, may emulate and possibly improve upon the enterprise.

PREMIUM AVAILABLE FOR QUALITY

It has been most conclusively demonstrated during the present year that our Canadian cattle, provided they are of *good beef type* and *well finished*, can invariably secure a price above the general market level, both at home and abroad, and when such cattle bought in as feeders, have been purchased at prices below speculative levels, there is offered a fair profit on feed consumed.

In outlining the history of this feeding project as undertaken by the Experimental Farms in order to demonstrate whether or not there is profit in the feeding of cattle at the present time, the fact should be emphasized that one of the precautions taken was that these cattle should be handled strictly on a commercial basis and, in so far as possible, with the same amount of labour and time as might be commonly available under conditions obtaining in the average feed lot in Canada.

MARKET TOPPERS AT HOME AND ABROAD

The program included three lots of steers, two lots of which were shipped to Great Britain in May, 1931, and when sold on June 9 brought the best prices paid for Canadian cattle on the British market since the reopening of our export trade in the fall of 1930. As well, the prices realized were equal to those obtaining for English home fed beef at the same time. The third lot was sold on the Montreal market for the Easter trade at a premium of fully \$1 per hundred over the current price for good steers.

The age and type of cattle fed, how they were fed, and the profit realized to the feeder, are outlined in the following paragraphs.

FED CALVES YIELDED \$7.79 PER HEAD

One of the lots shipped overseas consisted of 30 fed calves. These were well-bred ranch-raised 1930 Herefords, purchased in the fall of 1930 by the Experimental Station, Lethbridge, Alberta, at an average weight of 428 pounds and at a cost of \$6.96 per hundredweight landed at the Station. They were fed a ration of alfalfa hay, self fed, and a grain mixture composed of barley, 12 parts; oats, 6 parts; bran, 1 part; starting at 2 pounds per day and increasing

to 10 pounds per day over a 160-day feeding period. They made an average gain of 2.28 pounds per day at a feed cost of 6.7 cents per pound. When sold on the British market in June, 1930, they realized 12.3 cents per pound (based on their live weight off cars, Montreal). This price yielded a net return of 8.06 cents per pound on the farm shipping weight, less three per cent shrink, which was a sufficient margin over the purchase price to return a profit of \$7.79 per steer.

TWO-YEAR OLD STEERS NET \$11.63 PER HEAD

The second lot, also shipped overseas, consisted of 20 two-year-olds. These were of the same type as the previous lot, being from the same ranch but one year older, and were purchased by the Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, at an average weight of 657 pounds and at a cost of \$7.82 per hundredweight, delivered at Ottawa. They were fed a ration of silage, hay and meal, the latter composed of barley, 3 parts; gluten feed, 1 part; oats, 1 part; and oil cake, 1 part, starting at 2 pounds per day and increasing to 14 pounds per day over a 182-day feeding period. They made an average gain of 1.88 pounds per day at a feed cost of 9 cents per pound. When sold on the British market, they realized 12.9 cents per pound (based on their live weight off cars at Montreal). This price yielded a net return of 9.67 cents per pound on the farm weight, less three per cent shrink, which was sufficient to return a profit of \$11.63 per steer.

The Ottawa two-year-olds brought a better price and consequently a higher return than the Lethbridge yearlings, because they came nearer filling market requirements in weight and finish, and because shipping and selling costs are considerably less per hundred pounds than on the lighter steers.

SHIPPING AND SELLING OVERHEAD

The average cost of shipping and selling these two lots of cattle from their respective starting points was \$25.70 per head or \$2.80 per hundred pounds live weight in the case of the Ottawa lot, and \$36.15 per head or \$5.03 per hundred pounds live weight in the case of the Lethbridge lot.

As already stated, the above gross return of 12.9 cents per pound for the Ottawa cattle and 12.3 cents per pound for the Lethbridge cattle were the highest prices received per pound for Canadian cattle on the British market since the resumption of shipments in September, 1930, and, in addition, these prices were equal to the best prices which obtained for home fed cattle at that time.

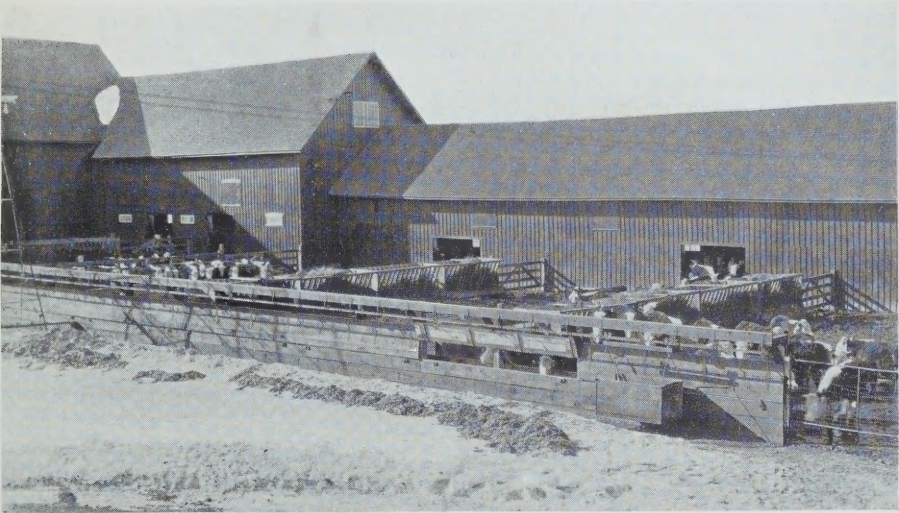
MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE MARKET

One reason for the good prices obtained was that in addition to being well finished, they were light weight cattle, the British market, in common with our own markets at the present time, paying a premium of from one to two cents per pound, dressed weight, for well finished light carcasses.

The lot sold on the Montreal market in March, 1931, consisted of 20 well bred Hereford steers from western ranges, purchased as calves in the fall of 1929, carried through the following winter on a good growing ration, pastured the following summer and stall fed during the winter of 1930-31. They were fed a finishing ration similar to that of the previous lot and made an average gain for the entire period of 1.18 pounds per day. When sold on the Montreal market, they brought 8 cents per pound, which price, while not sufficient to show a profit due to the big drop in prices between time of purchase and sale, nevertheless was fully one cent per pound higher than the best price paid for the other cattle on sale that week.

POSSIBILITIES IN STEER FEEDING

From the foregoing statements, it is quite apparent that Canadian cattle, provided they are of *good beef type* and *well finished*, can top the market both at home and abroad. With the present low prices for and plentiful supply of Canadian coarse grains, it would look, therefore, as though it were an opportune time for Canadian farmers in both the East and the West to turn their attention to the possibilities in the finishing of steers.



A general view of the steer feeding quarters at the Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, showing the different groups on feed during the fall and winter of 1929-30.

PROPER FINISH A PRIME REQUISITE TO-DAY

Every year the Canadian markets are glutted from early fall on with large runs of unfinished grass cattle, many of them large, old, rough animals. This lowers prices materially almost immediately so that the feeder and shipper take a direct loss. A further indirect loss is met through the fact that when this unfinished beef gets on the market it is of such poor quality that it decreases rather than increases demand for beef and the price depression continues. Not until Canadian beef cattle breeders, feeders and shippers take the steps to rectify this ever recurring condition in the beef cattle industry can they hope for improvement in the trade.

OUTDOOR FEEDING GENERALLY PRACTICABLE

There is no reason why more cattle can not be fed outdoors to a proper finish in both Eastern and Western Canada with a fair degree of profit to the feeder. As an outlet for low priced Canadian coarse grains, cattle feeding has great possibilities. The facilities necessary are very easily supplied. Outdoor feeding may be quite commonly practised in winter as long as the cattle have the benefit of a straw-covered shelter or an open front shed provided with plenty of bedding so that they can be comfortable between meals. A supply of water is important and not usually hard to obtain. Feeds the prospective feeder will have, otherwise he would not be considering the project of steer feeding. Some feeders may wish to finish steers during the grazing season in

order to get them ready for a special market. In such cases grain must be fed and a good plan is to use a self feeder by which to feed the grain. Plans for suitable shelters and self feeders may be obtained by writing the Division of Animal Husbandry, Experimental Farm, Ottawa.

TYPES AND AGES OF STEERS TO FEED

With reference to type, it may be said that regardless of age, within certain limits to be defined later, the market either East or West, home or export, will pay a substantial premium for cattle of the best beef type and quality that have the proper degree of finish.

Under Western Conditions

The Western feeder has the advantage of his Eastern brother in that he is near the best source of supply of good feeder cattle. These may either be cattle of his own raising or cattle he has bought. If the production of high class beef at twelve to fifteen months of age is contemplated, then the feeder can only afford to feed the very best type of beef bred calves of the deep, soggy, early maturing sort, taken direct from their dams at weaning time. Common types of ranch calves or calves of the pail fed variety will not make sufficiently good use of their feed to make baby beeves, being more inclined to grow than to lay on fat.

CARRYING THROUGH ON LIGHT GRAIN RATION

If it is not deemed desirable to follow such intensive feeding methods, the calves may be carried through on a good roughage ration with a light grain ration sufficient to promote good growth and hold their baby fat. Then at the opening of the pasture season they may be turned to pasture and fed grain on grass by means of a self feeder, the rate of feeding depending on the condition of the grass and the date at which it is intended to market the steers. The feeding of a little grain on grass will make sufficient difference in the quality of the carcass to lift it from the grass finished to the grain finished class and the feeder will benefit accordingly.

YEARLING STEERS MOST ATTRACTIVE FOR WEST

The majority of western feeders will find it most profitable, however, to buy and feed yearling steers. Steers of this age, having made the most of their growth, put on flesh to very good advantage. They should be secured fairly early in the fall, for there is a period from September to October, inclusive, when steers of this age barely hold the gains they made earlier in the season, consequently if these gains are to be made the most of, feeding should start early. These yearling steers may be crowded for an early finish or they may be eased along for a late spring finish or even for a finish with grain on pasture, depending upon the supply of rough feed, grain feed, or pasture available, and on the course of the market for the finished product. Generally speaking, however, it will be found most profitable to make the turnover as quickly as possible to avoid the piling up of unnecessary overhead charges.

THE AGE LIMIT FOR FEEDERS

In certain seasons we may find many unfinished two-year-olds being offered as feeders in the fall. This is about the limit in age for feeder cattle, for such cattle are usually so heavy that by the time they are suitably finished, the carcasses are too heavy for the premium class. Such steers, however, will often return a good profit for a short period of heavy feeding and when they are disposed of, lighter steers can be put in their place for a late spring or early summer finish.

Under Eastern Conditions

From the Eastern feeder's point of view, the feeding of calves into baby beef is not so attractive a project as it is in the West. Not many eastern calves are available and those that are belong largely to the pail fed variety, while newly weaned western calves receive such a set back by the time they are rounded up in the West, loaded, shipped East, unloaded and put in the feed lot, that they take some time to settle down to their feed. In fact, they seldom settle down to become as good quiet feeders as do identical calves fed in the West.

EASTERN CONDITIONS FAVOUR YEAR AND HALF STEER

Under present conditions, the most profitable age of steer for the eastern feeder to purchase and feed, having in mind the fact that his feeding operations are largely a winter proposition, is the year and a half old steer. A steer of this age weighing around 650 to 750 pounds is just the right size to meet the market demand in weights, whether marketed after a winter feeding period or after being grazed for a time with a supplementary grain ration.

What has been said about two-year-old steers under western conditions applies in much the same way under eastern conditions. It must be remembered, however, that within these age limits and other things being equal, the heavier the steer of good type purchased for feeding purposes, the greater the return, because not only does the feeder receive the full selling price per pound for every pound of gain that he puts on the animal but he also receives the difference between the purchase price and the selling price per pound on the original weight of the animal. This fact operates against the lighter steer and in favour of the heavier steer up to the point where the latter animal becomes so heavy that gains are no longer economically made and the market discriminates against the heavy carcass.

Briefly reviewing the situation, it may be said that:—

We have in Canada large quantities of coarse grains, i.e., barley, oats, feed wheat, etc., as well as abundance of good quality roughages for which there is a very poor market.

We have the ever recurring spectacle of large numbers of unfinished cattle going on our markets, causing immediate direct loss to the producer and ultimately depressing the whole cattle industry, yet such cattle could be finished satisfactorily on those feeds for which there is at present such a poor primary market and at a profit to the feeder.

Properly finished Canadian cattle of right type and breeding will top the markets both at home and overseas at a considerable premium to the producer and will improve the whole cattle trade of the country.

Fewer cattle, particularly of the leggy, unfinished kinds, and more of the deep, soggy, well finished kind, is what the market and consumer are demanding to-day, and there is profit for the producer in meeting that demand.



The twenty two-year-olds shipped from Ottawa in May, 1931, average weight 1,000 pounds each when photographed.